

# Carnival

by Paul de Denus

The dirt at my feet, soft as baby powder, reeks of wet hay, of cow shit in a tangle. Painted trailers and worn tents mark the grounds, their temporary structures taunting and luring the bored and stupid who mill about. A tall barker with a black fedora leans against a pole behind a dark table. He throws something at me and a sliced white smile cuts from his dark features. His face is that of a copperhead.

*... give it a try, he says...ring around the bottle...easy as that.*

It's not what I'm looking for. I move along with the other silhouettes, bouncing up and down like carousel horses about the midway. Ahead, a family waits in line for the next Ferris-wheel ride, the rickety steel sphere disappearing up into the October night sky. The faces of the younger children betray their fears. In front of stacked bowling pins, laughing trailer sluts squeal against their rugged beaus aiming to win a prize to be collected now or most surely later. Cheap tricks all of them. The stink of fried food and sweet candy blankets everything. I want to vomit.

I focus on the song in my head.

*...spinning wheel... got to go round... and round and round I go,* winding through the walkways with the funhouse crowd. I'm well aware of the shadow stalking just to my left, her mannish voice flirting with my sensibilities.

*"Don't be distracted, it says. Just let it shine."*

Against the indigo drape, the carnie lights flash and burn. The song dances along, showing me the way and I'm drawn to a light beside a sagging tent.

*...someone is waiting just for you... spinning wheel is spinning true.*

He stands alone. Delicate bone structure surrounds lost doe eyes where a rainbow spectrum radiates a glowing opalescent, perfect like mother's carnival glass kept deep in our root cellar.

*...just let it shine within your mind and show you the colors that are real.*

I quietly approach and show my tin badge and revolver tucked with authority inside my blue blazer. I gently tell him I'm Detective Tom and that his dad is waiting by the security corridor. I take his small hand and take him away. Boys are attracted to things so dangerously bright, the shiny objects they can't resist, the objects they must have. I'm walking proof of that.

